

NSC BRIEFING

16 April 1957

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OUTBREAK IN LAOS

- I. After long period of quiet, Pathet Lao rebels have stepped-up military pressure against Royal forces in remote northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly.
  - A. Attacks have forced Royal Army to abandon three forward positions, while fate of a fourth position is in doubt.
  - B. Two of these attacks, launched between 8 and 11 April and involving 200 to 300 Pathets, are largest rebel military actions in recent months.
  - C. Pathets have estimated 4,500 troops in Sam Neua, 1,800 in Phong Saly.
    1. Reported re-entry into Laos by some Viet Minh cadres, plus heavy weapons withdrawn in '56, may have stiffened Pathets.
- II. Royal Laotian army chief of staff at first reported disgruntled by failure of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma to give him clear-cut directive to counter Pathet military pressure.

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B. However, protracted negotiations on coalition--stalled during March over Pathet demand that Laos seek Communist Chinese aid--were resumed on 6 April.

1. At time of 6 Apr resumption, negotiating commission issued reaffirming communique covering all previous points of agreement: cease-fire, coalition government, special elections, policy of neutrality.
2. Since then, Pathet negotiators have been pressing for further Royal government concessions without offering any quid pro quo.

IV. Thus, present Pathet military pressure ~~therefore~~ may be designed to strengthen rebels' position at bargaining table.

A. Although Pathets may not intend to launch all-out military attack while prospect for negotiated settlement remains open, their present aggressive tactics could nevertheless provoke counter-action by the government possibly leading to general hostilities.

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